INdexing—a complex and complicated job

‘People who direct publishing houses and media and information services must recognise that indexing is a complex and complicated job that requires highly skilled personnel who must be given adequate training to learn their jobs and adequate time to do their jobs well.’

‘Indexers should be thoroughly familiar with the subject matter they handle. They should know not only their own special indexing jobs but should learn more about the principles and techniques of indexing and retrieval generally . . . .’

‘Indexing is an altogether pragmatic business. An index is as good as its users think it is. Its quality is determined by the number of enquiries it answers satisfactorily—nothing else . . . .’

‘I am also skeptical of projects to automate indexing. Machines are for mechanical functions; they do not think. They can be used to produce indexes more efficiently, more accurately, more quickly, perhaps more cheaply, and they can be used to search information systems. But indexing is itself an intellectual process that requires reflection, judgment, and discrimination, and I cannot envision that this will ever be done satisfactorily by machine . . . .’

‘Indexes are a service industry, like the telephone company, and, like the telephone company, they must furnish a quick and clear connection and smooth communication between callers and the objects of their calls.’—From an article by Dr. John Rothman, Editor of the ‘New York Times Index’, in ‘Special Libraries’, Vol. 57 (8), October 1966, 569-70.

The fifth edition of the Index of chemistry films (Royal Institute of Chemistry, 15s.) gives details of 1,600 films, 400 filmstrips and 80 film-loops on chemistry and related subjects from more than 200 sources.

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INDEXING—is not indexing

In the Daily Mail of 1st December, 1966, Charles Greville, the paper’s columnist, conducts a mildly facetious interview with the veteran Ashley Courtenay, 79, combined with an amicably sarcastic review of the 34th annual edition of the latter’s Let’s halt awhile, a guide to hotels, inns, guest houses and restaurants, published by Barrie & Rockliff. In the course of his article Mr. Greville states:

Some people feel the indexing could be better. On page 47, for example, Courtenay lists ‘Bosham and Old Bosham see nr Chichester’. Nr Chichester is on page 83 sure enough, along with the Bosham Hotel at Bosham. But there’s no mention of Old Bosham.

On page 235, with no cross reference, there’s a guest house at Old Bosham that is in fact nearer to Chichester than the one listed as ‘nr Chichester’.

‘I’m afraid our indexing isn’t very good,’ said Courtenay. His habit of admitting error is impressive. There is even an entry in the book that says: ‘It is so easy for “hotel” to be misprinted “hovel” and for “guests staying there” to read “guests starving there”. It has happened!’

It would have been even more ‘impressive’ if Mr. Greville and Mr. Courtenay had realized that they were both confusing the (encyclopaedia-type) alphabetical arrangement of the text of the book with its ‘indexing’. Actually Let’s halt awhile does contain an index—although for some reason best known to the compiler names of counties are treated as the main headings—and here Old Bosham is correctly referenced under ‘Sussex’. With all deference it is suggested that the arrangement of the book would have been improved if the county classification had been used instead in the text and the index had contained all names of towns, hotels, etc., each in its proper alphabetical order.

G.N.K.

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The Catholic Truth Society has recently published an index to the sixteen constitutions, decrees and declarations of the Second Vatican Council.
APPLIED SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY INDEX

Following a complete study by the American Library Association Committee on Wilson Indexes, the subscribers to Applied Science & Technology Index voted to expand the index's coverage effective with the January 1967 issue. The periodicals indexed increased from 195 to 225 with 52 new titles. Part of the timeliness of Applied Science & Technology Index is reflected by this change—periodicals in the fields of physics, aeronautics and space science, automation, information retrieval and computers, and general engineering have more than doubled. Periodicals in the fields of industrial and nuclear engineering, mathematics, construction, electricity and electrical communication, and general science have also increased.

Applied Science & Technology Index is published monthly except in August, with bound annual cumulations, and is sold by annual subscription on the H. W. Wilson service basis.

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A paper by J. Frederic Walker and Robert F. Schirmer on The Indexing of Technical Books, which was presented at a meeting of the Division of Chemical Literature of the American Chemical Society, was printed in the Journal of Chemical Documentation, February 1966. It describes the indexing system designed for the A.C.S. monograph Formaldehyde (3rd edition). The system, a modified concept co-ordination, uses a limited number of roles identified by mnemonics.

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International Associations is a monthly publication supplementing the Year Book of international organisations which was reviewed in our last issue; in addition to giving particulars of new organisations it contains articles of interest in the field and lists of international meetings and conferences to be held in the future.

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‘The major criticism is of what the publisher has the impertinence to describe as ‘a beautifully comprehensive index’. If it had been such an index it would have made all the difference to the book. In its present truncated form it is scarcely worth the paper it is printed on. It is a great disservice to the author who has so obviously spent so much time and care in writing her book. Obviously the next book in this resurrected series will need to be: An intelligent publisher’s guide to modern indexing.’—From a review by Dr. W. A. R. Thomson of An intelligent person’s guide to modern medicine (Gollancz) in The Financial Times, 19th September, 1966.

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‘This is an encyclopaedia of prefabricated fun, and you can inflict the feebler jokes on your favourite bore. The index is commendable: “H” for Happy Endings, Hillbillies, History, Holloywood and Humour.”—John Lucas reviewing Laugh day, by Bennett Cerf (Hammond, Hammond & Co.), in The Sunday Telegraph, 4th December, 1966.

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‘... a thoroughly enjoyable dip, though an index would have made it a more useful
one’—Marghanita Laski, reviewing The Observer of the 19th century selected by Marion Milliband (Longmans) in The Observer of 20th November, 1966.

‘But to the dark forces which give rise to such results, rendering vain so much human moral effort, he pays slight attention. One looks for “Original Sin” in the bishop’s index and does not find it; even plain, ordinary “sin” is oddly absent.’—From a review in The Times, 8th December, 1966, of F. R. Barry’s Christian ethics and secular society (Hodder and Stoughton).

‘If the Government were to consider an extension of its legislation for consumer protection, it might with advantage discourage application of the term “work of reference” to publications without a good and sufficient index.

Mrs. Pickthorn’s book suffers particularly from such an omission because it contains a great wealth of information amassed over a period of three years’—from a review by Brian Weller in The Teacher, 10th June, 1966, of Helen Pickthorn’s The student guide to Britain (Pan Books).

In its review of The West on trial: my fight for Guyana’s freedom, by Cheddi Jagan (Michael Joseph Ltd.) the Chronicle of the West India Committee for December 1966 offers this comment: ‘The book is furnished with an indifferent index, e.g. the entry of “Communism, see Soviet Russia”. But what we are interested in is communism in British Guiana, especially as affecting the author, to which there are several references in the text. Again, the important topic of West Indian Federation, which had such an inglorious end, has no entry at all, under either W or F.’

At the end of his review of The Penguin book of modern verse translation, edited by George Steiner, Raymond Mortimer comments in The Sunday Times of 18th December 1966: ‘Finally, there is no alphabetical index of either the translators or the poets they translate’.

‘Here are only the bare bones of Mrs. Barea’s distinguished book (Vienna by Isa Barea: Seeker & Warburg)’ which is flawed only by its sloppy index’—Nigel Dennis, in The Sunday Telegraph, 5th June, 1966.

‘Incidentally, The new classes [by Robert Millar (Longmans)] has no index, which is like a railway time-table not giving the names of the stations’—Malcolm Muggeridge in The Observer, 20th November, 1966.

An indexless book has been likened to many things in its time (e.g. to a country without a map), but Malcolm Muggeridge’s original time-table comparison seems a particularly happy one.

‘... His admirable work deserves, but has not got, an index’—from a review in The Times of 1st December, 1966, of Rudyard Kipling by J. I. M. Stewart (Gollancz).

The Church Times of 28th July, 1967, highly praises Daphne du Maurier’s latest work, Vanishing Cornwall (Gollancz), which it calls ‘a splendid book, popular in the best sense’, and then it adds: ‘But why is there no index?’

The West Indies Chronicle is constantly to the fore in exposing the lack of, or inadequacy in, indexes in the books it reviews. In its July, 1967, number it concludes its notice of Constitutional theory and practice in the West Indies by Dr. Claudius C. Thomas (Mohr) by stating: ‘This study is an offprint of a section of a German yearbook and consequently lacks its own index, which is a great pity. One should have been provided for this publication’.

‘This is not a dry work of reference (yet it is none the less a pity that no index is provided) but pure gold to be mined again and again’—Michael Wallach reviewing, in the Jewish Chronicle of 23rd June, 1967, Moshe Vilensky’s A history of Hebrew creative thought, edited by Joseph Fraenkel (Tel Aviv, Abraham Zioni, 63s.).
Beverley Nichols says, in the Sunday Telegraph of 24th July, 1967, that he will be greatly surprised if some enterprising film company does not swiftly snap up the rights in Woody, a study of a late famous clairvoyant by her equally famous clairvoyant son, Maurice Woodruff, and published by Cassell. ‘Woody,’ says Mr. Nichols, ‘has a cast so glittering that the index reads like a selection from Debrett, Who’s Who and Spotlight.’

A review of Annals of printing: a chronological encyclopaedia from the earliest times to 1950 in The Times Literary Supplement of 2nd February, 1967, concludes as follows: ‘The lack of a good general history of printing on a national or European scale is rightly deplored by the compilers in their preface. Until such a work is produced, these annals, which aim to provide a chronological encyclopaedia of the subject, will be useful within their limits. Subsequent editions will no doubt be better indexed, and will have an augmented and corrected text.’

A good index and full bibliography are evidence of Professor Southwick’s objectivity and fairness’—from a review in the Lancet, 1st July, 1967, of Rights and responsibilities under National Health Service by Arthur F. Southwick (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, $7.50).

Starting with the 1965 annual volume, The New York Times Index has been illustrated.

The importance of noting the presence (or absence) of an index when reviewing books, quite apart from the reviewer’s comment on the quality of the index, is becoming realised more and more by the editors of periodicals. The February 1967 issue of Mining Electrical Engineer, in setting out the bibliographical details of the three volumes of Seth D. Woodruff’s Methods of working coal and metal mines, gives ‘illustrated; bibliog.; index, Price’.

René Elvin reviewing Detail, volume 3: Contemporary architectural design, edited by Konrad Gatz (Iliffe, 95s.), in Industrial architecture, June, 1967, writes: ‘The work, printed in Germany, is well produced, though the half-tones might have been sharper and more glossy. A graver defect is that it has no index. In a work devoted to the praise of attention to detail, this is not easy to forgive, as it detracts measurably from its value as a work of reference; the table of contents, without cross-references to architects, etc., is inadequate.’

Following a leader in The Times Literary Supplement of 19th February, 1967 concerning the placing of footnotes, and the confusing indexing in scholarly works, a letter from George H. Nodel draws attention to inadequate indexing, e.g., listing names only, in reference books or texts. He points out that by the 18th century, analytical subject topic, and name indexing had reached a peak that is rarely approached today. After observing that French scholarly publications seem to be worse in this respect, he says that although Anglo-American scholarly publishing has certainly no cause for self-congratulation it appears to be based on less elitist and more exacting notions of what the requirements and obligations of the scholarly community are.

Anthony Powell, reviewing the Letters of Wallace Stevens (Faber & Faber) in The Daily Telegraph on 23rd February, 1967, wrote, ‘There is the impression that the Letters have been rather severely edited by his daughter [Holly Stevens], who has also supplied an excellent index’.

‘A very poor bibliography and equally disappointing index (it is a pity that a member of the Society of Indexers did not advise on this matter) limit the value of this book to workers in this field.’—T. J. Hunt, reviewing Stephen Black’s Man and motor cars (Secker and Warburg, 63s.) in the British Medical Journal of 18th February, 1967.
THE VALUE OF AN INDEX


'... The teacher must exercise a similar critical apparatus ... in his choice of books for his school. He will presumably look for good detail, a modern interpretation of the period, clarity of style and sensitivity to language difficulties, as well as clear relevant maps and illustrations. There should also be a full index and sensible table of contents, since a textbook, as a technical instrument for use, is like a man without fingers if it lacks an index. Skill in finding relevant information swiftly is a necessity in developing the student's ability to become increasingly independent of his teacher in his studies. Exercises to develop this skill should be begun in the lower school. One simple method is for the teacher to prepare a list of questions of detailed factual knowledge, using the index as his source, and have the class work out the answers, also using the index. In time, students become very skilful at this, and it is a kind of game as well, since accuracy with speed are the two goals.'

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University chemistry has without doubt the most complete and detailed index (25 pages, three-column, small print!) that this reviewer has ever seen in an introductory chemistry book. This aspect, so often carelessly done in otherwise good textbooks, is an excellent feature.'—From a review by Grant W. Smith of University chemistry by John C. Bailar, Jr., and Therald Moeller (Boston, D. C. Heath, $9.25) in J. Chem. Education, September, 1965.

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'Unfortunately it has no index, is full of small, but irritating errors of fact, and is equipped with a most misleading genealogical table.'

This pretty strong stricture is from the pen of Kyril FitzLyon reviewing Catherine the Great by Zoë Oldenbourg (Heinemann) in the Daily Telegraph, October 21st, 1965. It is true that this historical biography is translated from the French, but that should be no excuse for publishing the English version without an index.

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'Regretfully I notice an error in the index that makes it appear that Mr. Nubar Gulbenkian is dead. Happily the gargoyle face of the ubiquitous Nubar is still a feature of the London scene.'—Tudor Jenkins, reviewing Editorial by Sir Colin Coote (Eyre & Spottiswoode) in the Evening Standard, October 26, 1965.

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'It seems almost incredible that such an important biography [The pirates' priest: the life of Père Labat in the West Indies, 1693-1705, by Erlid Young and Kjeld Holweg-Larsen: Jarrolds] should have been published without an index.'—Chronicle of the West India Committee, October, 1965.

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'Indexes are, of course, unknown in France, but the English publishers might have set a good example in a volume that particularly requires one.'

This rebuff is from the pen of Anthony Powell in reviewing Force of circumstance, by Simone de Beauvoir, translated by Richard Howard (Deutsch and Weidenfeld & Nicolson) in The Daily Telegraph, September 23, 1965.

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'A good index is provided which with the ample notes can direct a reader to further study of this important concern.'—Miller M. Cragon, Jr., reviewing The educational mission of the church by Robert J. Havithurst in The Living Church (U.S.A.), September 5, 1965.
SOVIET 90-SECOND INDEXES

'Twenty years after the war,' writes Mr. John Erickson (Senior Lecturer in Government, Manchester University) in The Times of October 1, 1965, 'the Russians, having already produced some 12,000 books about it, are still deeply engaged in an enormous enterprise to fix the substance and establish the significance of their wartime experience.

'Behind the books lie the reaches of the military and political archives, where Stalin not only denied access but also left chaos. Now only scrupulous and efficient order meets the eye in the "scientific apparatus" used to produce the Soviet "official history", the recently completed six-volume (and one-volume abridgement) account of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union, 1941-5.

'Housed in its own section of the Marx-Lenin Institute in Moscow, the core of the system is a massive cabinet of indexes, which list primary material for each day, week, month and year of the war. Its efficiency is such that any document can be traced in some 90 seconds or, conversely, the indexes can be read to select or to isolate particular items.' (The italics are ours.)

'Good indexes are uncommon. What makes "The American Negro Reference Book" really useful as a reference is, finally, its index. Stupendous is the word for it. It runs for nearly 100 pages and contains every kind of cross-reference one could conceivably need. The work of Jessica L. Harris and Theodore C. Hines, this index makes up for most of the volume's defects. It is here that the encyclopedia begins.'—So writes Eliot Fremont-Smith when reviewing The American negro reference book, ed. by John P. Davis (Prentice-Hall, $19.95), in The New York Times, February 25th, 1966. Good to see the indexers are named.

'Miss Lutyens makes the story fascinating to the general reader and instructive to all students of the period, who will be grateful for the exemplary index'—Raymond Mortimer, reviewing Millais and the Ruskins, by Mary Lutyens (Murray) in The Sunday Times of 22nd January, 1967.

In its notice of The Parnell Tragedy, by Jules Abel (The Bodley Head) on 20th January, 1967, The Church Times states that 'the index leaves much to be desired'.

'The index to Volume 1 is adequate, but that to Volume 2 is so terse as to be hardly of use'—so writes W. H. J. Childs in his review in Nature of 4th February, 1967, of Measurement and control in science and industry, edited by Arnold Wexler (New York: Reinbold Publishing Corporation; London: Chapman and Hall), $30 and $27.50 respectively.

Mr. R. C. Wellstood of Danbury, Connecticut, sends the following review of The regiments and corps of the Canadian Army (Ottawa: Queen's Printer) from Adjutant's Call, journal of the Military Historical Society, Vol. 4 (3), 1965, and comment:

'This reviewer would have liked an index to all units mentioned in the text so that long-forgotten ones could be easily located; e.g., an exotic name like "Le Régiment de Temiscouata et Rimouski" now "Les Fusiliers du St. Laurent".

The book has an index to all the present-day units both alphabetically and by seniority but, as mentioned above, none for the preceding units. There is no way for an uninformed person to find any old-time unit without going through the book page by page.

BINDING CASES FOR 'THE INDEXER'

Subscribers who have bound volumes of The Indexer are reminded that binding cases to match those used for binding earlier volumes may be obtained from the Hon. Editor. The rates are mentioned under The Indexer heading towards the end of this issue.